

China's International Positioning and Its Diplomacy since Reform and Opening-Up

Lu Jing

The reform and opening-up is a great change in contemporary Chinese society. It not only brought about tremendous changes to China, but also profoundly changed the relations between China and the world. In the diplomatic field since the reform and opening-up, guided by the ideological line of “liberating the mind and seeking truth from facts,” China has adhered to scientific judgment of the international situation and the external environment, keeping in mind both internal and international imperatives, and has broken new ground amid reform and innovation. As China becomes more integrated with the world in a comprehensive and in-depth way, China has significantly changed its diplomatic concepts, policies, patterns and styles. At the same time, China retains the stability and continuity of its overall strategy. China's international positioning, which has always been a critical premise for the formulation of China's diplomatic strategy, plays an important role in this duality. “Those who misjudge China's positioning in world politics at least do not have a correct international strategy.”¹ Therefore, to examine China's diplomacy since the reform and opening-up from the perspective of international positioning will help us better understand the changes and continuation.

Connotations of International Positioning

In international relations, international positioning generally refers to the

Lu Jing is Professor at the Institute of International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University.

¹ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.2, People's Publishing House, 1994, p.376.

basic perception and evaluation of a country's international position at a particular time. It determines the role and function of the country in the international community. Specifically, international positioning mainly includes the following aspects.

First, international positioning is an integrated three-dimensional structure. The international positioning of a country mainly refers to its position in the three dimensions of international power, institutional and cultural systems. The position of a country in the international power system is based on the country's territorial area, population size, resource endowment, etc., with its comprehensive strength in terms of economy, military, and science and technology as the core. The position of a country in the international institutional system is embodied in whether the country is the dominant player in the center of the system, an active participant seeking to approach the center, or a passive participant in the margin. The position of a country in the international cultural system is the country's perception and identity in the international community, which demonstrates its spiritual pursuit and value orientation.

The three dimensions of international positioning are not isolated from each other but constitute a unity of three components that interconnect and interact with each other. A country's position in the international power system determines its position in the international institutional system, because material strength is often the basis of and prerequisite for institutional power. Without solid material strength, a country will not truly acquire a dominant position in the international institutional system or consolidate it. The international institutional power of a country in turn serves the material strength and reinforces its geopolitical status. The position of a country in the international institutional system also affects its identity and place in the international cultural system, as the international system is composed of a set of such core elements as principles, rules, norms and patterns of behavior, and is embodied in the pursuit of certain values and concepts. The national and cultural identity shaped and influenced by the international system will also have counteraction on the international system itself. Therefore, the

positioning of a country in international power, institutional and cultural systems is an integrated three-dimensional structure.

Second, international positioning is the unity of subjective perception and objective facts. International positioning comes directly from subjective perception, especially that of national leaders and major political forces about their international status. Therefore, the personal temperament, background and experience of leaders and decision-makers greatly influence a country's international positioning. However, subjective perception should be based on objective facts, and those facts that determine the perception of national positioning primarily include the objective existence of a country's power, institution and culture in the above three dimensions. The material strength of a country is basically an objective entity that is operable and quantifiable. The position of a state in the international institutional system can also be objectively evaluated through its share, voting rights and right of speech. A country's cultural attributes, though mostly subjective, also contain an objective aspect, which is mainly embodied in facts that have become undisputable consensus, for example, China's attributes as a socialist country and an ancient civilization of the East. Therefore, a scientific international positioning is perception and evaluation based on objective facts, which also determines that it is the unity of objective facts and subjective perception.

To assess a country's international positioning, it is necessary to grasp the objective facts that determine the positioning, understand whose judgment and perception the positioning mainly derives from, and analyze the basic world outlook, dominant value, background, perspective, logic of thinking, and personality traits of this person (or group), especially his (or their) view of national interests. National interests are the core element of international positioning, and they are the unity of objective existence and subjective perception. All countries have their own fundamental and objective national interests, on which their understanding and pursuit of national interests must be premised.² Objectively, the specific national

2 Xing Yue, "Objectivity and Subjectivity of National Interests," *World Economics and Politics*, No.5, 2003, pp.28-33.

interests of each country change as the situation changes; subjectively, each country recognizes its national interests according to the international environment and its own strength, scientific and technological level and cognitive level.³ This unity of subjectivity and objectivity in national interests is also reflected in the perception and evaluation of international positioning.

Third, international positioning is the unity of synchronicity and diachronicity. It is not only a synchronic concept that is static and horizontal, but also a diachronic one characterized by being dynamic and vertical. It not only shows the position of a country within an established international system in a specific historical period, but also demonstrates its position when it interacts with other actors in the evolving international system. Synchronicity and diachronicity are not a pair of binary opposition but a dialectical unity. A specific historical period is part of a dynamic time process, while the chronological course of development is also demonstrated by a specific point of time.

Therefore, to analyze the international positioning of a country, it is necessary to carry out dynamic analysis in the historical dimension as well as static analysis in the spatial dimension. The analysis of international positioning in the historical dimension shows the stage a country has arrived at in the long history. It can tell whether the development direction is progressive, stagnant or regressive, and how the country's identity has changed. The analysis of international positioning in the spatial dimension displays the country's place in the international structure, indicating its sphere of influence.

Fourth, international positioning reflects the interaction between internal and external perception. A country's international positioning is formed in the interaction between self-perception and others' perception, and it is the interactive unity of domestic and international cognition. As mentioned above, international positioning is a kind of subjective perception based on objective facts. The mentality, state of mind, horizons, observational perspective and logic of thinking of the subject all have

3 Yan Xuetong, *International Politics and China*, Peking University Press, 2005, pp.28-31.

important influence on the formation of international positioning. Different subjects will thus have different perceptions of the same country's international positioning in the same period. Nonetheless, for sensible decision-makers, it is necessary to "sensitively recognize cognitive differences and try to narrow such differences in order to improve decision-making and enable intents to be achieved to a greater extent."⁴ Therefore, the international positioning of a country often needs to be refined through continuous tests of both self-perception and others' perception.

In fact, the external perception of a country's international positioning reflects the country's influence and the attention it receives from the international community. In the information age, external perception plays an important role in shaping a country's image and affecting national interests. Almost all countries, especially major powers, value how others view themselves. As such, the external perception should not be ignored even if it is way apart from self-positioning and does not meet or even contradict with a country's own needs. Instead, a country should carefully analyze the causes to the difference, find solutions, bridge the gap between internal and external positioning, and better interact with the rest of the world.

In short, international positioning is formed under the influence of various factors, and is in constant development and change. It is prominently characterized by its complexity, diversity and variability. Any country has a pluralistic international positioning in a particular historical period, and national interest is the main determinant for making a correct choice amid the complex and pluralistic international positioning. Though national interests are also pluralistic and dynamic, a country has different prioritized interests in different periods, and the basic international positioning should proceed from fundamental and core national interests. The international positioning based on national interests is the basic premise for a country to formulate its foreign strategy. In other words, international positioning is an important component of a country's foreign strategy.

4 Qin Yaqing, "Cognitive Differences between Subjects and China's Diplomatic Decision-Making," *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.4, 2010, p.3.

Evolution of China's International Positioning

China's international positioning mainly reflects the fundamental perception and evaluation made by the Chinese government and especially the policy-makers. They base the positioning on China's national interests and basic dimensions of the Chinese context, conform to international and historical trends, and comprehensively consider China's history, traditions, culture as well as the response of the international community. It not only "clarifies China's position and role in contemporary international community in a dynamic and comparative sense, and the relationship between China and the existing international system and international order," but also "indicates its features in terms of social system and value orientation."⁵ The evolution of China's international positioning since the reform and opening-up can be divided into three historical stages, in light of the three key factors of international situation, national conditions and leaders' personality.

Early stage of reform and opening-up (1978-1989)

The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held in December 1978 established the ideological line of emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts. Based on judgment of the international situation and summarizing the experience and lessons of China's socialist construction, a great strategic decision was made to implement reform and opening-up and shift the focus of the Party and the state to economic construction. With the advance of reform and opening-up, China's international positioning has shifted from a highly ideologically-driven socialist country to a developing socialist country focusing on economic development and implementing reform and opening-up.

Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of China's reform and opening-up,

5 Cai Tuo, "Reflections on the International Positioning of Contemporary China," *China Social Sciences*, No.5, 2010, p.132.

believed that China's most important national interests at that time were economic development and socialist modernization. He clearly pointed out that "only socialism can save China, only socialism can develop China,"⁶ and "China is unswervingly committed to socialism."⁷ However, poverty is not socialism, as "socialism must vigorously develop productivity, gradually eliminate poverty, and constantly improve people's living standards."⁸ Therefore, "economic work is the biggest political task at present, and economic problems are overriding political issues."⁹ "The political line of our Party at this stage, put briefly, is to focus on the four modernizations of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology."¹⁰ At the 12th CPC National Congress in 1982, economic construction was identified as a central national interest. Being open to the rest of the world is the prerequisite for economic development. "It is impossible for any country to develop if it is isolated and closed, nor is it possible to develop if it does not strengthen international exchanges and not introduce advanced experience, science and technology, and capital from developed countries."¹¹ Meanwhile, sovereignty and national security remain the most fundamental national interests of China. Deng maintained that "the sovereignty and security of the country should always be placed first,"¹² and repeatedly emphasized that "independence and self-reliance are our footholds, whether we are in the past, present or future."¹³

Reform and opening-up has transformed the major goal of China's diplomacy from advancing world revolution to safeguarding and consolidating sovereignty and national security. Meanwhile, it promotes peace, develops cooperation and creates a peaceful and stable international environment for China's economic construction. For this reason, China

6 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.3, People's Publishing House, 1993, p.311.

7 *Ibid.*, p.328.

8 *Ibid.*, p.10.

9 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.2, p.194.

10 *Ibid.*, p.276.

11 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 3, p.117.

12 *Ibid.*, p.348

13 *Ibid.*, p.3.

discarded the dogmatism of social system and ideology, and has pursued an independent foreign policy of peace, proactively developing friendly relations with the rest of the world, especially with Western developed countries. With respect to this, Deng pointed out that “economic construction is impossible without a peaceful environment.”¹⁴ “We regard striving for peace as the primary task in our foreign policy. Striving for peace is both the requirement of people of the world and what is needed for us to carry out economic construction.”¹⁵ It was clearly pointed out in the 13th CPC National Congress in 1987 that China will continue to unswervingly pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and develop friendly and cooperative relations with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Therefore, seeking for a peaceful and stable international environment conducive to China’s economic construction, China had been firmly adhering to an independent foreign policy of peace in the international community in the early stage of reform and opening-up.

Reform and opening-up has enabled China to prudently participate in the existing international system dominated by Western countries. As an economically backward country which was ill-experienced in dealing with Western countries, China was actually marginalized without power when it first joined the international economic system. With a prudent and inquisitive attitude, China studied and adapted to the international situation, seeking cooperation with the rest of the world. Meanwhile, due to its huge population, territory, resources and long-standing historical and cultural traditions, China was naturally a major power in terms of geopolitics. The resumption of legitimate representation in the United Nations as a permanent member of the Security Council in 1971 especially strengthened China’s status as a geopolitical power. Therefore, despite being weak and powerless in the international economic system and ill-experienced in participating in international political and cultural systems, China had an international political position that almost all world powers could not ignore,

14 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 3, p.233.

15 *Ibid.*, p.116.

which constituted the basis for China to deal with other global powers.

Deepening of reform and opening-up (1989-2012)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, China was faced with an international and domestic situation that had undergone tremendous changes. Internationally, the drastic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War have caused unprecedented crises to the international socialist movement, leaving the US as the only superpower that started to build a world order under a unipolar hegemony hostile to the socialist China. Domestically, the Western world joined hands to impose sanctions on China in the wake of the political turmoil in 1989, while China, where the reform and opening-up entered a crucial stage, was enmeshed in contradictions as the social structure and interests were undergoing profound adjustment. In the critical time of complexity and difficulty, Deng Xiaoping put forward the guiding principles for foreign relations: “observe calmly, hold the ground, handle issues with composure, exercise self-restraint, and stop short of claiming leadership while making contributions.” Through a calm observation of the international strategic situation, the Chinese government believed that the world was developing in a multi-polar direction, and peace and development remained the two major themes of the world; socialism would always hold its ground in the world, and the banner of Chinese socialism would not fall down. Therefore, China continued adhering to the strategic guidance that “development is of overriding importance,” concentrating on economic construction, and upholding the socialist system. The aim of China’s foreign policy remained safeguarding world peace and promoting common development, and the overall strategic arrangement of China’s work relating to foreign affairs was still to create an international peaceful environment conducive to modernization and reform and opening-up. It can be seen that although the end of the Cold War greatly changed the international and domestic situation, China’s basic understanding and judgment of the international situation and national interests remained unchanged fundamentally. China

was still a major socialist developing country in the process of reform and opening-up. China's diplomacy continued to serve the reform and opening-up and socialist modernization. China still followed the independent foreign policy of peace and continued to develop friendly and mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries.

The third-generation CPC central leadership with Comrade Jiang Zemin as its core insisted that it had become a world trend to put economy first. This is an inevitable result of historical progress. For every country at present, economic development comes before all other issues. In addition to national economy, people's livelihood, and long-term stability and security of a country, development also concerns world peace and stability. The economy is indeed becoming the most important and crucial factor in today's international relations.¹⁶ The CPC Central Committee with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary also constantly stressed the necessity of sticking to the centrality of economic development, focusing on construction, developing wholeheartedly, and continuously emancipating and enhancing social productivity. With the aim to better develop the economy, the Chinese government actively implemented a comprehensive diplomatic strategy of peaceful development according to changes at home and abroad, and attached more importance to strengthening and developing the solidarity and cooperation with developing countries. Jiang Zemin pointed out, "We must be good at handling relations with major powers, try to seek benefits while avoiding harms as much as possible, expand common interests with all parties, and strengthen political dialogue, economic cooperation and scientific and technological exchanges with these countries."¹⁷ At the same time, "China's interests are in line with the fundamental interests of third-world countries, as we have common historical sufferings and face the common task of safeguarding national independence and developing the economy ... It is the third-world countries that China mainly relies on in international affairs. It is our huge political advantage to sympathize with and support them on international occasions." Therefore,

16 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.1, People's Publishing House, 2006, p.414.

17 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.2, People's Publishing House, 2006, p.414.

“strengthening the solidarity and cooperation with third-world countries is the basic standpoint of China’s foreign policy.” As for neighboring countries, “we should start from the overall situation, adhere to principles, strengthen exchanges, seek common ground while reserving differences, increase trust, develop cooperation, and strive to expand common interests.”¹⁸

The Chinese government also recognized that economic globalization, as an objective trend of global economic development, cannot be reversed by man’s will, and the development of world economy requires both courage and skills to participate in the competition of economic globalization and make full use of resources and markets at home and abroad. Correspondingly, the vast developing countries has a broad market with great potential for development. This understanding enabled China to speed up its opening-up to the rest of the world and begin to vigorously explore markets in developing countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia as well as Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. “Going global” became a major strategic decision made by the government in the mid-1990s that would have profound influence on China’s overall and long-term socio-economic development. Meanwhile, China actively participated in the current international economic system. In particular, China’s accession to the World Trade Organization at the end of 2001 enabled it to engage in international economic cooperation and competition at a wider, broader and higher level.

Entering the 21st century, China is no longer a passive recipient marginalized by the international system. Instead, as its national strength continues to grow and its status in the international system is significantly improved, China is becoming an active builder of the international system and has begun to usher the Chinese voice on issues of common concern in the international community. Jiang Zemin put forward the view of “world diversity,” advocated maintaining the diverse nature of the world, and promoted the democratization of international relations and variety of development models. He also actively advocated China’s new security

18 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.2, pp.372-373.

concept of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination. Hu Jintao, based on China's adherence to the path of peaceful development, proposed building a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity, which expressed China's desire for peaceful development and its willingness to become a responsible major country. "Always integrating our development with the common progress of mankind, we take full advantage of the opportunities brought by world peace and development to pursue our own development while going for better promotion of world peace and common development through our successful development. China will, as always, abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, actively participate in international affairs and fulfill its international obligations, and work with other countries in building towards a new international political and economic order that is fair and rational."¹⁹

New era of reform and opening-up (2012-present)

The 18th CPC National Congress in 2012 is a vitally important meeting in the decisive stage of China's building of a comprehensively well-off society. Profound changes have occurred in the international situation facing China. On one hand, peace and development remain the theme of the times, global cooperation becomes multi-level and all-round, the overall strength of emerging market economies and developing countries has increased, and the balance of international power has become more conducive to maintaining world peace. This has provided China, still at the primary stage of socialism, with favorable external conditions to further deepen its opening-up. On the other hand, while emerging economies including China have maintained a good momentum of development after the outbreak of global financial crisis in 2008, and China overtook Japan in 2010 as the world's second largest economy and thus gained a more prominent position in the world economic structure, it also faces severe structural pressures and challenges. Many countries see China as

19 Hu Jintao, "Build towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity," speech at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations' 60th Session, *People's Daily*, September 16, 2005, p.1.

a “quasi-superpower” or “the world’s second largest power,” with some touting a “China threat” rhetoric and some others calling for China to take more responsibilities. Some hope that China will become the leader of the developing world, while some worry whether China will challenge the existing international order. A huge perceptual difference exists in internal and external understandings of China’s international positioning.

To better safeguard national interests, China needs to take the perceptual difference seriously, try to narrow it, and adapt its own international positioning based on objective assessment of the world situation and national conditions. As to the international situation, the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping as its core believes that “despite profound and complex changes in the international and domestic situation, we have not changed our major judgment that China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development.”²⁰ With regard to basic national conditions, Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized that “it is the overarching dimension of the Chinese context that our country is still and will long remain in the primary stage of socialism,” and that “China’s international position as the world’s largest developing country has not changed.” However, he also pointed out that “we are closer than ever before to making the goal of national rejuvenation a reality” and “China is increasingly approaching the center of world stage.” In view of this, while the Chinese government sticks to its international positioning as a developing country and China’s diplomacy still serves the overall situation of domestic development, as a rising power and a country with increasing influence on international peace and development, China has proposed a new positioning as a responsible major country in the international community, based on the general trend of world development and its historical traditions and socialist attributes. The international positioning as a responsible major country means that the Chinese government is responsible to the international community while being responsible for its own people, and that China must take into account

20 Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Second Full Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee (Excerpt),” *Qiushi*, No.1, 2016, p.3.

the development of other countries and effectively coordinate national and global interests as well as domestic and international responsibilities while pursuing its own development, as an effort to narrow and bridge the gap between the Chinese and foreign perceptions of China's international status.

With unprecedentedly strong global interdependence, "the international community has increasingly become a community with a shared future in which there is something of each in the other. Amid the complex situation of world economy and global problems, no country can manage alone and outshine others. It is necessary for all countries to stick together through thick and thin."²¹ In this context, Xi Jinping proposed the goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind, which includes building partnerships in which countries treat each other as equals, engage in mutual consultation and show mutual understanding; creating a security architecture featuring fairness, justice, joint contribution and shared benefits; promoting open, innovative and inclusive development that benefits all; increasing inter-civilization exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness and respect for differences; building an ecosystem that puts mother nature and green development first.²² Building a community with a shared future for mankind reflects China's strong sense of responsibility to actively engage in solving international problems. It also expresses China's strong desire to pursue peaceful development and win-win cooperation, and provide solutions for the development and progress of human society.

In order to build a community with a shared future for mankind, China has been vigorously advocating a new concept of peaceful development and win-win cooperation, and striving to promote a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation. It is developing global partnership in the political and security field, and advancing the Belt and Road Initiative in the economic field in

21 "Xi Jinping: China Is Practitioner of Win-Win Cooperation," *People's Daily*, December 6, 2012, p.1.

22 Xi Jinping, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind," speech at the general debate of the 70th UN General Assembly, *People's Daily*, September 29, 2015, p.2.

pursuit of win-win outcomes through interconnectivity. At the same time, it has actively participated in global governance, advocating a governance concept of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and contributes Chinese efforts to solving global problems. As Xi Jinping emphasized, “China’s development has benefited from the international community, and we are ready to provide more public goods to the international community.”²³ “We will open our arms to the people of other countries and welcome them aboard the express train of China’s development.”²⁴ China will make its development achievements benefit the world more.

According to China’s international positioning and its diplomatic influence since the reform and opening-up, China has had different international positioning in different historical periods. Some aspects of the positioning have been profoundly changed, such as China’s transition from a poverty-stricken and underdeveloped country into an emerging power, from being marginalized by the international system to standing at the center of world stage, from a passive participant in international affairs to a responsible major country that plays a certain degree of leading role. Some other aspects of the positioning are basically unchanged, such as China’s status as a developing country, a socialist state, a participant in the international system, and a defender of the international order. The “changed” and “unchanged” aspects of China’s international positioning have profoundly affected its diplomacy, leading to major changes while maintaining the stability and continuity of basic strategy.

Continuation and Changes of China’s Diplomacy

In the past 40 years of reform and opening-up, China’s international

23 “Xi Jinping Attends Opening Ceremony of the 2016 B20 Summit and Delivers Keynote Speech,” Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 3, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/t1395086.shtml.

24 Xi Jinping, “Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth,” keynote speech at the opening session of the World Economic Forum annual meeting 2017, January 17, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/18/c_135991184.htm.

positioning has developed with some aspects changed and some others not. Under the guidance of emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts, China's diplomacy has been keeping pace with the times and undergoing constant changes and innovation while maintaining inheritance and continuity. Today, with the improvement of China's international status, the style, characteristics and manner of China's diplomacy have become increasingly distinct, but its purpose, objectives, and core values remain unchanged fundamentally. This has also ensured its overall strategic stability and continuity. The evolution of China's international positioning and its impact on diplomacy can be summarized in the following three aspects.

First, China's basic attribute as the largest developing country remains unchanged. The Chinese diplomacy will continue to be subordinate to and serve domestic development. However, given the changing understanding of the connotations of development, the connotations of China's diplomatic objectives and policy instruments have undergone significant changes.

Thanks to the 40 years of reform, opening-up and economic construction, China has become the world's second largest economy. While the pace of economic development and scale advantages have greatly enhanced China's position in the global economic system and economic governance, they have also made some countries question China's positioning as a developing country. The 19th CPC National Congress clearly pointed out, "The basic dimension of the Chinese context—that our country is still and will long remain in the primary stage of socialism—has not changed. China's international status as the world's largest developing country has not changed." China's development still faces many difficulties and challenges: the imbalance and inadequacy of development is still a prominent issue, and the system and capacity for governance need to be further strengthened.²⁵ Therefore, although China's national strength has been greatly improved since the reform and opening-up, its basic positioning as the largest

25 "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Xi Jinping's report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," *People's Daily*, October 28, 2017, p.1.

developing country has not changed. This determines that the basic goal of China's diplomacy is still to serve the overall national development.

In the meantime, China's understanding of the connotations of development has been constantly enriched and developed. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the lack of material resources and the low material living standards made China's development concentrated on improving material living standards and developing economic productivity. In the 1990s, China's concept of development was upgraded to pursuing comprehensive socio-economic development. In the 21st century, the people-oriented Scientific Outlook on Development was widely recognized. "Putting people first requires us to aim at achieving comprehensive human development, promote development for the sake of the people's fundamental interests, continuously meet their ever-growing material and cultural needs, and effectively protect their economic, political and cultural rights and interests, so that the fruits of development benefit all."²⁶ While insisting that development is the basis and key to solving all problems in China, Xi Jinping declared that "the aspirations of the people to live a better life must always be the focus of our efforts," and stressed that "we must pursue with firmness of purpose the vision of innovative, coordinated, green, and open development that is for everyone."²⁷ The continuous deepening and enrichment of the understanding of development has enabled China's diplomacy to change its manners and means under the premise of serving the overall domestic development, with the meaning of its objectives constantly expanded. From economic diplomacy to environmental, public and consular diplomacy, China's diplomacy has incorporated more objectives such as diplomacy for the people, building a harmonious world and promoting a community with a shared future for mankind, while continuing to safeguard national independence and sovereignty and advancing world peace and development.

26 *Selected Important Documents since the 16th CPC National Congress*, Part 1, Central Literature Publishing House, 2005, p.850.

27 "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Xi Jinping's report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China."

Second, the positioning of China's essential attribute as a socialist country has not changed, but China has different answers to the historical topic of socialism in its different stages of development, which also continuously innovates and develops the socialist diplomatic thinking with Chinese characteristics.

Since its founding in 1949, the PRC has held fast to its essential attribute as a socialist country, therefore staying committed to pursuing fairness, common prosperity, and social harmony at home while upholding justice and equality in the international arena. Even at the beginning of reform and opening up when China was still poor and backward, China still insisted on making independent decisions on global affairs and international issues according to their own merits for the sake of the long-term and fundamental interests of its own people and the people of the world. China resolutely opposed hegemonism and great-power chauvinism, actively advocated the establishment of a fair, equal and reasonable new international economic order and a new international political order based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

China has different answers to the historical topic of socialism in its different stages of development, and different perceptions of the primary tasks of socialism are also reflected in China's diplomatic practice. Deng Xiaoping clearly pointed out that "in essence, socialism is about liberating and developing productivity, eliminating exploitation and polarization, and ultimately achieving prosperity for all."²⁸ Among the many tasks of socialism, the fundamental and primary one is to liberate and develop social productivity. China could only make more contributions to mankind if it changed its backwardness. To this end, China must implement the strategy of reform and opening-up, which required that "we regard striving for peace as the primary task of foreign policy."²⁹ With the development model of liberal capitalism in predicament in the wake of the global financial crisis and the international landscape undergoing profound

28 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.3, p.373.

29 *Ibid.*, p.116.

transformation, the international community has witnessed extremely fierce competition among various values. Under this background, China held high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the world and strived to offer Chinese wisdom and Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind, regarding this as China's historic responsibility. Thus, China's diplomacy has particularly highlighted the leading role of the value of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and emphasized that "The Communist Party of China strives for both the wellbeing of the Chinese people and human progress. To make new and greater contributions for mankind is our Party's abiding mission."³⁰ It is obvious that continuously making greater contributions to mankind is an important innovation and development for the diplomatic thinking of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

Third, China's international positioning as a participant in the international system and a defender of the international order remains unchanged, but its international role and influence have changed in a significant way along with its position in the international system.

After the launch of reform and opening-up, China gradually participated in the international division of labor and competition, as well as in the West-dominated international system and institutions. Initially, China was cautious and inquisitive due to its lack of strength, low status and alertness. As the reform and opening-up deepened, China came to recognize that its goals of reform, opening-up, and building a socialist market economic system are consistent with the West-led principles and development objectives based on open and market-oriented policies. In particular, the defining historical trend of economic globalization has made China's development inseparable from the world, so China began to participate in the international economic system in a more active manner. In 2001, by becoming a member of the World Trade Organization, China

30 "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Xi Jinping's report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China."

obtained its status inside the international trade system, which also made it more determined to maintain the existing international economic order. Meanwhile, China has also engaged in the international political and security system and the social and cultural system in an all-round manner, and has become the defender and contributor of the existing international order.

Today, China is increasingly approaching the center of world stage, with its interests and fate highly intertwined with the rest of the world. China has clearly recognized that its own development is benefited by the existing international system and the international community, and as such China is willing to contribute to international development with its own development. China is actively advocating the concept of community with a shared future for mankind and striving to embark on a road of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. Today, with the soaring trend of anti-globalization, protectionism and populism, China has followed the historical trend and is actively making economic globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all. Against the background of profound adjustment of the international structure, China has vigorously promoted a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation. When global governance is faced with deficits of peace, development and governance, China has advocated a global governance concept of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, in an effort to offer Chinese solution and contributions to effective global governance. In short, guided by the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, China's diplomacy will strive to work with the international community and build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.

Conclusion

China has accumulated considerable valuable experience and lessons through its diplomatic practices in the past 70 years. The secret to China's

diplomatic achievements lies in finding a correct international position, which is also an important prerequisite for the formulation of diplomatic strategy. As analyzed above, international positioning is a complex and pluralistic concept in dynamic development, and China's international positioning has both something "changed" and something "unchanged" over the years since the reform and opening-up, all of which have had influence on China's diplomacy. In addition, we should also be aware of the following three issues.

First, China's diplomacy operates in a complex dynamic system. There are different views within the academic community on the driving force of China's diplomacy. Some insist that it is driven by domestic politics and believe that diplomacy is a continuation of domestic affairs. Some argue for the decisive role of external environment and believe that China's diplomacy is basically a reaction to the international situation. Some propose that it is driven by individuals and hold that the fundamental dynamics of China's diplomacy is the leaders' vision and leadership. Some also seek to explain the issue by looking at the practical interactions between and dynamic evolution of China and the international system. Different interpretations illustrate the complexity, diversity and variability of the driving force of China's diplomacy, and the complicated, pluralistic and dynamic characteristics of the concept of international positioning reflect that China's diplomacy is in an intricate dynamic system.

Second, China's national interests are changing. A country's international positioning reflects its core and prioritized national interests in a given historical period. The evolution of China's international positioning since the reform and opening-up thus reflects the development and changes of China's national interests in the international community. At the beginning of reform and opening-up, the pursuit of development centered on material productivity was China's primary national interest. With the growth of material wealth, development guided by the Scientific Outlook on Development became the main pursuit of China's national interests. Meanwhile, the enhancement of comprehensive national strength

and the improvement of international status has enabled China to pursue a higher level of value while seeking its own development interests, and it has become an important extension of China's national interests to make greater contributions to the development of human society. At the same time, as the international positioning as a developing country remains unchanged, development has always been China's core national interest, and China has consistently positioned itself as a contributor to global development.

Third, China's concept of peaceful diplomacy, which has been pursued since the founding of the PRC, is constantly being enriched and developed. Since the reform and opening-up, China has adhered to the concept of peaceful development, actively seeking peace, promoting development, and implementing a foreign policy in this direction. However, given the national conditions and the world situation, for some time China mainly focused on a responsive concept of peace that safeguarded its own security and development interests, and pursued passive peace goals such as no conflict, no confrontation, no belligerence and stability. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with increasing global interdependence and growing national power, China has further enriched and developed the concept of peaceful development and put forward the idea of a harmonious world. It no longer only focused on its own interests when it pursued peaceful development, but has begun to undertake the global responsibility to achieve lasting peace and common prosperity in the world, which is an active concept of peace. As the world has increasingly become an inclusive community in which there is something of each in the other, the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind has transcended that of a harmonious world and expressed China's new world outlook of pursuing true peace for and common development of all mankind. With the Chinese concept of peaceful diplomacy constantly being enriched and developed, China will continue to be a contributor of world peace and a defender of the international order. 🌐